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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001914

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/14/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: ABDULLAH ENERGIZED ABOUT CAMPAIGN, WORKING FOR  
SECOND ROUND

REF: A. KABUL 1521  
[B](#). KABUL 1647  
[C](#). KABUL 1849

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Karl Eikenberry  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (SBU) SUMMARY: On July 14, Ambassador Eikenberry met with presidential candidate Dr. Abdullah Abdullah to discuss the state of the presidential campaign. Invigorated by his trips to the provinces and boasting an ambitious travel schedule for the next few weeks, Abdullah expounded on his campaign plans, speculated about President Karzai's intentions and discussed his vision for an Abdullah administration. He expanded on his previously stated platform of decentralization (refs A and B), noting that Afghanistan's window of opportunity to make use of international community support is narrowing. He was hopeful about pushing the election to a second round and optimistic about his performance should that occur. The Ambassador emphasized the importance of a partnership between the international community and a new administration and the pillars on which the future relationship would be based. End Summary.

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Campaigning in the Provinces  
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[2](#). (SBU) Arriving at lunch directly from a campaign stop in Ghor's provincial capital of Chaghcharan, Abdullah reported no difficulties in coordinating Afghan National Army (ANA) air support, providing sufficient notice is given to ANA authorities. Chaghcharan was his fourth campaign trip using ANA aircraft; in the past weeks he has visited Jalalabad, Uruzgan and Badakhshan, where ANA provided air support not only to the province but between districts. ANA has denied only one of Abdullah's travel requests, which he admitted to putting in only 12 hours in advance. He found the denial reasonable given the lack of lead time.

[3](#). (SBU) Abdullah said he plans to visit Herat, Bamyan, Faryab, Paktya, Kunar, Nuristan and Laghman and hopes to get to both Helmand and Kandahar in the coming weeks, but will visit at least one of the two. He was pleased with the level of supporter turnout he'd seen so far. In Jalalabad he claimed 15,000-20,000 supporters had turned out for a rally, although Nangarhar Governor Shirzai was absent, and at least 3,000 people at each of the five Badakhshan locations he visited. He recounted the story of a Badakhshan female provincial council candidate who began campaigning for Abdullah in a mosque as a show of spontaneous support.

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Demographic Support  
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[4](#). (SBU) Abdullah said he viewed his support through the lens of demographics, rather than by regional strength. Citing youth, women and mujahedeen as key support bases, he

described a student rally of a few thousand held on his behalf by Kabul University students earlier in the week. He was pleased by what he described as the "student-led initiative," but said the Ministry of Interior had initially said it could not provide Afghan National Police (ANP) to support the event and only conceded an hour before the planned start time when it was clear the event would continue with or without the police.

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Playing Politics with the Police?  
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15. (C) Ambassador Eikenberry raised the international community's concern over Balkh Governor Atta's impolite criticism of Karzai and interference in the dismissal of two ANP officers (Ref C). He reinforced that the international community must walk a fine line when it comes to tolerating such behavior, which is not suitable. Abdullah admitted that Atta had made inappropriate remarks and said he had advised Atta, as a friend, that he should not continue to cross that line. He countered that Karzai receives inappropriate support from officials, and accused IDLG director Popal and Minister of Education Farooq Wardak of campaigning in the provinces. Abdullah noted Atta's view that the removal of the ANP officers was purely political, with charges of corruption coming only after the removal. He conceded the MOI's right to move police positions, but asserted that politics are playing a larger role than appropriate in some changes, highlighting a recent replacement of the Panjshir chief of police.

KABUL 00001914 002 OF 002

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Abdullah's Platform & U.S. Relations  
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16. (SBU) The Ambassador emphasized that the United States looks forward to a partnership with the new Afghan government. He saw a focus on five areas of the relationship: Afghan sovereignty, reconciliation, development of formal governance, development of the justice sector and informal governance, and a regional strategy. Abdullah commended the US approach, identifying self-sufficiency for Afghanistan as a top priority of his platform and improving public perception of the government.

17. (SBU) Abdullah described the need to reform the justice sector and improve governance, criticizing Karzai for placing ethnic politics above good governance. Abdullah said he would be willing to invite certain current well-qualified ministers to stay in their positions, but did not know if they would be willing to stay under his administration. He accused Karzai of moving governors at random and asserted that the governor system needs to be reviewed with integrity and merit ranking top in qualifications. The people of the province also need a voice in the process, including direct election of governors.

18. (SBU) Abdullah expounded on the need to decentralize the Afghan government and strengthen provincial and district level decision makers. This would allow the people to have a greater say in their own affairs and to feel connected with the process of government. He acknowledged that detractors say decentralization will fatally weaken the government, but asserted that while a strong center remains important, without evolution and devolution the Afghan government will not survive. Abdullah supported moving to a parliamentary system, saying the current system was given an opportunity and now needs develop to prevent failure of the state.

19. (SBU) The Ambassador stressed the need for the next administration to take advantage of the assistance offered to Afghanistan by the international community. Abdullah recognized that the new government must successfully partner

with the United States and the international community to bring progress. He noted that without progress, the United States would withdraw from Afghanistan and "we will never get you back." He believed that if the U.S. withdrew without significant improvement to the Afghan government, then central government would flounder and Afghanistan would become a failed state.

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Media & Electoral Complaints  
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¶10. (SBU) Abdullah said that his campaign is filing daily complaints to the Electoral Media Commission (EMC) regarding the bias of state-run RTA television; a bias noted in the EMC's July 9 press conference on election coverage. RTA's bias was particularly evident in their coverage of Karzai's July 13 trip to Kandahar. Abdullah welcomed taking advantage of TOLO TV's proposed debate between Karzai, Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani; Karzai is currently declining to participate. Abdullah would consider participating without Karzai but would prefer that he and Ghani receive questions from a moderator and not engage each other in a debate.

¶11. (C) He also said he has filed complaints with the Electoral Complaints Commission regarding Karzai's use of state resources for his campaign. He expressed concern that the Karzai campaign would try to influence the election through fraud, but did not identify any specific methods for concern. Another concern for campaign support is embodied by the July 15 media report that the head of Abdullah's campaign in Nejrad district in Kapisa was shot and killed by an unidentified gunman.  
EIKENBERRY